THE LIFE

OF

REV. JOHN FLETCHER:

ABRIDGED FROM
AUTHENTIC SOURCES
BY A FRIEND OF SABBATH-SCHOOLS

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By
An Anonymous
Friend of Sabbath Schools

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Jean Guillaume De La Flechere (afterward the Rev. John Fletcher) was born at Nyon, in Switzerland, on the 12th of September, 1729. His father was a member of one of the most respectable families in the canton of Berne, and for several years held a commission in the French army. The subject of this memoir was his eldest son.

John spent the early part of his life in his native town; and soon discovered an elevated turn of mind, accompanied by an unusual degree of vivacity. He made a good proficiency in his preparatory studies, and was afterward removed to Geneva, where he was equally distinguished by his superior abilities, and uncommon application. He allowed himself but little time either for recreation, refreshment, or rest. Close confinement during the day, was frequently followed by a devotion of a large portion of the night to writing. The first two prizes, for which he stood a candidate, he carried away from a number of competitors; and received from his superiors very flattering compliments on the occasion. Here he laid the foundation of that accurate knowledge of philosophy and theology for which he was afterward distinguished.

After he had finished his studies at Geneva, his father sent him to Lensbourg, a small town on the Swiss cantons, where he diligently prosecuted the study of the German language, together with some other sciences, to which he ever manifested a most ardent attachment. After he had spent a few months at this place, he returned home; where he remained some time, studying the Hebrew, and perfecting his acquaintance with mathematical learning.

In childhood he had a deep sense of the majesty of God, and a constant fear of offending him, attended with an unusual sensibility of conscience. The following circumstances are given as an example: -- One day, having displeased his father, who threatened to correct him, he feared to come into his presence, and accordingly retired into the garden; presently he saw his father coming toward him, when he turned and ran away from him with all speed. But he was suddenly struck with deep remorse, and said to himself, "What I do I run away from my father? Perhaps I shall have a son who will run away from me!" The impression this made upon his mind, remained several years.

A second instance of his tenderness of conscience occurred when he was about seven years of age. The nursery maid reproved him by saying, "You are a naughty boy. Do you not know that the devil is to take away all naughty children?" He was no sooner in bed, than he began to reflect very deeply upon her words. He thought, "I am a naughty boy, and how do I know but God may let the devil take

me away this night?" He then got up, and having knelt before God, prayed very earnestly: -- after praying some time, he felt such a sense of the love of God as quieted every fear. He then laid down in peace and safety.

Mr. Fletcher's early acquaintance with the Scriptures, together with the restraining influences of Divine grace, preserved him from the vices of youth. His conversation was modest, and his general deportment strongly marked by rectitude and propriety. He manifested a strong predisposition to religious meditation; and the productions which gained him the greatest applause were of a serious nature. In filial obedience, and fraternal affection, he was very exemplary; it is not remembered that he uttered one expression which was unbecoming a child or a brother. He constantly reproved sin; and by his modest freedom of reproof, is said to have displeased a mother whom he tenderly loved. On a certain occasion, while she was speaking with too much warmth to one of the family, he turned his eye toward her with a gentle reproof. She was offended by it, and returned it with some severity of manner and warmth of temper. He received her reply with the utmost submission, only answering, "When I am smitten on one cheek, and especially by a hand I love so well, I am taught to turn the other also." There was so much of propriety and affection manifested, that his mother's indignation was instantly subdued.

Persons who are designed by God for eminent usefulness in his Church, are frequently distinguished in their youth by striking peculiarities. These are intended to excite attention, to bring the individuals themselves into notice, and to induce expectations of something extraordinary in their future character. Such may have been the design of the following circumstance: -- During his residence at Geneva, his sister, with whom he boarded, was visited by a widow lady and her three sons. Neither the mother nor the sons possessed the most happy disposition, and such was the conduct of the son; on one occasion, that the mother was greatly provoked, and, in the heat of her temper, uttered a hasty imprecation. Mr. Fletcher was so struck with the unnatural carriage of the mother, that he instantly started from his chair; and addressed her in a very powerful remonstrance. He reasoned with her in an affecting and pointed manner. He observed and lamented the difficulties of her situation; but entreated her to struggle against them, not with impatience, but with discretion. He exhorted her to educate her children in the fear of God, and to second her instruction by her own pious example. After assuring her that her conduct on the occasion had filled him with the utmost horror, he concluded his address by alarming her fears, lest the imprecation which she had uttered should be followed by some unexpected affliction. The same day she embarked upon the lake on her return home, and was overtaken by a tremendous storm, in which she came very near perishing. In the midst of the danger, the words of her young prophet (as she ever after termed Mr. Fletcher) were deeply impressed upon her mind. But they shortly after returned upon her in a more forcible manner, by the melancholy intelligence, that two of her sons were lost upon the lake, and that the third was crushed to death at one of the gates of Geneva. At this time Mr. Fletcher was about fourteen years of age.

While but a youth, he several times very narrowly escaped the loss of his life. The two following instances are selected, as being the most singular. They are given in his own words:--

"One evening I, and five young gentlemen, in high spirits, made a solemn agreement with each other, to swim the next day to a rocky island, which was five miles from the shore. But this foolish

adventure was within a very little of costing us all our lives. I and another indeed did, with great difficulty and hazard swim to the island; but when we came thither, the rock was so steep and smooth, that we could not possibly climb up. After swimming round it several times, and making several ineffectual efforts, we thought we must perish there. But at length one of us found a place where we made a shift to crawl up: he then helped his companion. The others swam about half way, and just as they were sinking, a boat took them up. Another boat, which we had ordered to follow us, afterward came and took us home."

The account which he gave of another deliverance, is yet more striking. "Some years since, I lived very near the river Rhine. In that part it is broader than the Thames at London, and is extremely rapid. But having been long practiced in swimming, I made no scruple of going into it at any time; only, I was always careful to keep near the shore, that the stream might not carry me away. Once, however, being less careful than usual, I was unawares drawn into the mid-channel. The water was extremely rough, and poured along like a galloping horse. I endeavored to swim against it, but in vain, till I was far from home. When I was almost spent, I rested upon my back, and then looked out for a landing place, finding I must either land or sink. With much difficulty I got near the shore; but the rocks were so ragged and sharp, that I saw, if I attempted to land, I should be torn in pieces: so I was constrained to turn again to the midstream. At last, despairing of life, I was cheered by the sight of a fine, smooth creek, into which I was swiftly carried by a violent stream. A building stood directly across it, which I did not then know to be a powder mill. The last thing I could remember was, the striking of my breast against one of the piles on which it stood. I then lost my senses, and knew nothing more until I rose on the other side of the mill. When I came to myself, I was in a calm, safe place, perfectly well, with out any soreness or weariness at all. Nothing was amiss but the distance of my clothes, the stream having driven me five miles from the place where I left them. Many persons gladly welcomed me on shore; one gentleman in particular, who said, 'I looked when you went under the mill, and again when you rose on the other side, and the time of your being immerged among the piles was exactly twenty minutes.' "

Mr. Fletcher's parents desired and intended that he should become a clergyman, when he had gone through the usual course of study at the university of Geneva: his natural talents, and acquired abilities, qualified fulfillment services in the Church; but contrary to all their expectations and designs, he had not reached the age of twenty, when he manifested purposes of an opposite character. His theological studies were superseded by those which were calculated to fit him for the camp, rather than the Church. All the remonstrances of his friends, on this change of his position, were ineffectual; and had not the providence of God thwarted and defeated his projects, he would have wielded other weapons than the sword of the Spirit. Of this change in his purposes, he gave the following account, which was dated a few weeks before his ordination: -- "From the first time I began to feel the love of God shed abroad in my heart, which was, I think, at seven years of age, I resolved to give myself up to him, and to the service of his Church, if I should ever be fit for it; but the corruption which is in the world and that which is in my heart, soon weakened, if it did not erase, those first characters which grace had written upon it. However, I went through my studies with a design of going into orders; but afterward, upon serious reflection, feeling that I was unequal to so great a burden, and disgusted by the necessity I should be under to subscribe to the doctrine of predestination, I yielded to the desire of those of my friends who would have me go into the army.

But just before I was quite engaged in a military employment, I met with such disappointment as occasioned my coming to England."

He assigned three reasons for declining the work of the ministry. First, He judged himself unqualified for so high and so holy a calling. Secondly, He could not conscientiously subscribe to the articles of faith of the Geneva Church, which he must have done before ordination. Thirdly, He disapproved the undertaking of an office so sacred as that of preaching the Gospel from any worldly consideration whatever.

He tried in vain to obtain the consent of his parents; they continued opposed to his entering the army. He however left home for Lisbon, where he obtained a captain's commission, raised a company of his country men, and engaged in the service of the king of Portugal. He was to embark on board a man-of-war, which was to sail for Brazil, and was fitting for sea with all dispatch. He now wrote to his parents, requesting them to send him a considerable sum of money, which he hoped to use to great advantage. But they positively refused to make the remittance. Unmoved by this, he determined to go without it, as soon as the ship should sail. But he was accidentally scalded, and was obliged to keep his bed for several days. During this time the ship sailed, and was never heard of afterward.

He returned from Lisbon, and still ardently desired to obtain a commission in the army. When he was informed that his uncle, then a colonel in the Dutch service, had obtained a commission for him, he joyfully set out for Flanders. But just at that time peace was concluded; and soon after his uncle died, when his hopes, being blasted, he gave up all expectation of being a soldier.

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As he had no employment, he resolved to spend a short time in England, and accordingly proceeded to London. On his arrival he met with some difficulty, on account of his ignorance of the English language. He knew not how to obtain currency in exchange for his foreign money. He mentioned his difficulty to a well-dressed Jew, whom he happened to hear speaking French, near the door of the inn where he had taken lodgings. The Jew replied, "Give me your money, and I will get it changed in five minutes." Mr. Fletcher immediately gave him his purse, which contained nearly four hundred dollars. On acquainting his companions at the inn, with what he had done, they all cried out with one voice, "Then your money is gone. You need not expect to see a crown, or a doit of it any more. Men are constantly waiting about the doors of these inns, on purpose to take in young strangers." Seeing no way to help himself, he could only commend his cause to God. And that was enough. The Jew soon returned, and brought him all the money.

During the next eighteen months, Mr. Fletcher resided at a boarding school, where he studied the English language, together with all the branches of polite literature. Here he was serious and reserved in his behavior; diligent and successful in his studies. His easy and genteel address, with his eminent sweetness of temper, gained him the esteem and affection of all his acquaintances. The fear of God was rooted in his heart, and was continually before his eyes, but he had no one to lead him forward in the paths of piety.

At the conclusion of the term just mentioned, a French minister procured him the place of private tutor to two sons of a gentleman in Shropshire. In the year 1752, he removed to Mr. Hill's family, and commenced the instruction of the young gentlemen. He still feared God, but did not enjoy a sense of his favor. A circumstance now occurred, which in some degree convinced him of the depravity of his heart. While writing some music on the evening of a Sabbath day, a servant came into his room to light up his fire. This person looked at him with serious concern, and said to him, "Sir, I am sorry to see you so employed on the Sabbath day!" At first his pride was mortified and his resentment moved, at being reproved by a servant. But upon reflection he felt the reproof to be just. He immediately put away his music, and from that time became a strict observer of the Lord's day.

While in Mr. Hill's family, he first became acquainted with the Methodists. The following is his own account of his earliest knowledge of them: -- "When Mr. Hill went to London to attend parliament, he took his family and myself with him. While they stopped at St. Albans, I walked out into the town, and did not return until they were set out for London. A horse being left for me, I rode on and overtook them in the evening. Mr. Hill asked me, why I stayed behind? I answered, 'As I was

walking, I met with a poor old woman who talked so sweetly of Jesus Christ, that I knew not how the time passed away.' 'I shall wonder,' said Mrs. Hill, 'if our tutor does not turn Methodist by and by.' 'Methodist, madam,' said I, 'pray what is that?' She replied, 'Why the Methodists are a people that do nothing but pray; they are praying all day and all night.' 'Are they,' said I,' then, by the help of God, I will find them out, if they be above ground.' "

We have observed that Mr. Fletcher gave some evidence of piety in very early life. But we are not prepared to decide whether he experienced a real change of heart, or only felt some of those gracious drawings of Divine love, which frequently precede conversion. If at that time he was truly justified by faith in Christ, he subsequently he lost both the enjoyment and the fruits of this grace, and remained in this state for several years.

Mr. Fletcher was naturally of a high and ambitious temper of mind. He had acquired exalted opinions of the dignity of human nature, and was desirous to act accordingly. Hence he aspired after rectitude, and was anxious to possess every moral perfection. He was rigidly just in his dealings, and inflexibly true to his word; strict in the performance of his relative duties, liberal in his sentiments, and profuse in charity; he was prudent and exemplary in his general conduct, a strenuous advocate for virtue, and a constant attendant on public worship. While possessing so many moral accomplishments, it is not remarkable that he should cast a look of self complacency upon himself, and consider himself, with respect to his attainments in virtue, very much superior to the common herd of mankind. He did not appreciate his true character, until some time after he came to England.

A friend now invited him to go and hear the Methodists; he readily accepted the invitation and went; and from that time he became more and more deeply convinced of the necessity of a change of heart. He began to labor with the utmost diligence, according to the light he had, hoping that by doing much he should render himself acceptable to God. But he soon heard a sermon which convinced him, that salvation was, "by grace through faith;" that he was destitute of saving faith, and did not even know what was its nature.

"Is it possible," he thought, "that I, who have always been accounted so religious, who have made divinity my study, and have received the premium of piety (so called) from the university, for my writings on Divine subjects -- is it possible, that I should yet be so ignorant as not to know what faith is?"

But the more he examined himself, and considered the subject, the more he was convinced of the momentous truth. And seeing more clearly the depravity of his heart, and the sinfulness of his life, together with the purity of God's law, and his guiltiness before the Lord, his hope of pardon and salvation began to die away. He next sought by the most rigorous austerities to conquer his evil nature, and bring peace to his troubled soul: but the more he strove, the more he saw the sinfulness of his heart, and felt the impotency of human nature. And now he was entirely at a loss to know what to do, being fully conscious of his danger, but seeing no way of escape. Every other refuge failing, he ultimately laid hold of Gospel hope set before him. We give a large extract from his diary, which will furnish the best account of his mental exercises, and religious experience at this period: --

"January 12, 1755. I received the sacrament, though my heart was as hard as a flint. The following day, I felt the tyranny of sin more than ever, and an uncommon coldness in all my religious duties; I felt the burden of my corruptions heavier than ever; there was no rest in my flesh. I called upon the Lord, but with such heaviness that I feared that it was lost labor.

"The more I prayed for victory over sin, the more I was conquered. Many a time did I take up the Bible to seek comfort, but not being able to read, I shut it again. The thoughts which generally engrossed my mind were these: I am undone; I have wandered from God more than ever; I have trampled under foot the frequent convictions which God was pleased to work in my heart. Instead of going straight to Christ, I have wasted my time in fighting against sin with the dim light of reason, and the mere use of the means of grace, as if the means would do me good without the blessing and power of God. I fear my knowledge of Christ is only speculative and does not reach my heart. I never had faith, and without faith it is impossible to please God. Therefore all my thoughts, words, and works, however specious before, if I am not washed and renewed before I go hence, I am lost to all eternity.

"When I saw that all my endeavors availed nothing toward conquering sin, I almost gave up all hope, and resolved to sin on and go to hell. But I remember there was a sort of sweetness even in the midst of these abominable thoughts. If I go to hell, said I, I will serve God there; and since I cannot be an instance of his mercy in heaven, I will be a monument of his justice in hell: and if I show forth his glory one way or the other I am content. But I soon recovered my ground. I thought Christ died for all, and therefore he died for me. He died to pluck such sinners as I am, as brands out of the burning: and as I sincerely desire to be his, he will surely take me to himself, -- he will surely let me know, before I die, that he hath died for me, and will break asunder these chains, wherewith I am bound. If he leave me for a little while in this dreadful state, it is only to show me the depth of the misery out of which he will draw me. I must then humble myself under his mighty hand, and in his appointed time he will lift me up. But I then thought, perhaps, this may not be till my dying hour, -- and must I sin on till then? How can I endure this? But again, I thought, my Saviour was above thirty-three years working out my salvation; let me wait for him as long, and then I may have some excuse for my impatience. Does God owe me any thing? Is he bound to time and place? Do I deserve any thing at his hands but damnation? I would here observe that anger, in particular, seemed to be one of those sins which I could never overcome. So I went on sinning and repenting, and sinning again; but still calling on God's mercy through Christ.

"I was now beaten out of all my strong holds; I felt my helplessness, and lay at the feet of Christ. I cried though coldly, yet I believe sincerely, 'Save me, Lord, as a brand snatched out of the fire, give me justifying faith in thy blood; cleanse me from my sins; for the devil will surely reign over me until thou shalt take me into thy hand. I shall only be an instrument in his hand to work wickedness, until thou shalt stretch forth thine almighty arm and save thy lost creature, by free, unmerited grace.' I seldom went to private prayer, but this thought came into my mind: -- This may be the happy hour when thou shalt prevail with God. But still I was disappointed. I cried to God, but my heart was so hard that I feared that it did not go with my lips.

"On Sunday the 19th, I heard an excellent sermon on these words, 'Being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.' I heard it attentively, but my heart was not

moved in the least; I was only still more convinced that I was an unbeliever, that I was not justified by faith, and that till I was, I should never have peace with God. I sat mourning while others rejoiced in God their Saviour. I went home, still resolving to wrestle with the Lord like Jacob, till I should become a prevailing Israel.

"On the 21st, in the evening, I read the Scriptures, and found a sort of pleasure in seeing a picture of my weakness so exactly drawn in the third chapter of the Epistle to the Romans: and my condition in the seventh chapter. And now I felt some hope that God would carry on the work he had begun in me.

"I often wished to he acquainted with me one who has been just in my state, and resolved to seek for one to whom I might unbosom my whole soul, and apply for advice. As I had heard that mourners had sometimes found comfort in reading over any passage of Scripture they had opened upon, I opened the Bible once for that purpose, but I found nothing that gave me comfort, and so I did it no more for fear of tempting God.

"Thursday, my fast day, Satan beset me sore. I sinned, and grievously too. And now I almost gave up all hope. I was on the brink of despair; and continued nevertheless to fall into some sin as often as I was assaulted with temptation. All this while, though I had a clear sense of my wickedness and what I deserved; and though I often thought that hell would be my portion if God did not soon pity me, yet I was never much afraid of it. Whether this was owing to a secret hope, lodged in my mind, or to hardness of heart, I know not, but I was continually crying out, 'What stupidity! I see myself hanging as by a thread over hell and yet I am not afraid, but sin on! O what is man without the grace of God! a very devil in wickedness, though inferior to him in experience and power.' " In the evening he visited a friend who said to him, "God is merciful, God loves you -- wait patiently for him, and never give up your hope." "I went home," he says, "resolved follow his advice, though I should wait till death. I retired to my room and went to bed, commending myself to God with more of hope and peace than I had felt for some time. But Satan waked, while I slept. I dreamed that I had committed grievous and abominable sins; awoke amazed and confounded, and rising with a detestation of the corruption of my senses and imagination, I fell upon my knees with more faith and less wanderings than usual; and afterward went about my business with uncommon cheerfulness.

"It was not long before I was tempted by my besetting sin, but found myself a new creature. My soul was not even ruffled I took not much notice of it at first, but having withstood two or three temptations, and feeling peace in my soul through the whole of them, I began to think it was the Lord's doings. Afterward it was suggested to me, that it was great presumption for such a sinner to hope for so great a mercy. However, I prayed that I might not be permitted to fall into a delusion; but the more I prayed, the more I saw that it was real. For though sin stirred all the day long, I always overcame it in the name of the Lord.

"In the evening, I prayed earnestly, and with an humble assurance, though without great emotions of joy, that I might have dominion over sin, and peace with God; not doubting but that joy and a full assurance of faith would be imputed to me in God's good time. I continued calling upon God for an increase of faith; for I still felt some fear of being in a delusion; and having continued my application till near one o'clock in the morning, I then opened my Bible on these words, Psalm lv, 22, 'Cast thy

burden upon the Lord, and he shall sustain thee, he will not suffer the righteous to be moved.' Filled with joy, I again fell upon my knees to beg of God that I might always cast my burden upon him. I took up my Bible and opened it again on these words, in Deut. xxxi, 'I will be with thee, I will not fail thee nor forsake thee; fear not, neither be dismayed.' My hope was now greatly increased, I thought I saw myself conqueror over sin and hell.

"With this comfortable promise, I shut up my Bible, being now perfectly satisfied. As I shut it, I cast my eye on that word, 'Whatsoever ye shall ask in my name I will do it.' So, having asked grace of God to enable me to serve him till death, I went cheerfully to take my rest."

In answer to prayer, he soon after obtained a still clearer manifestation of the favor of God. His bonds were all broken, and he was enabled to say with confidence, "There is, therefore, now no condemnation to them who are in Christ Jesus -- The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death." Knowing in whom he had believed, he could now rejoice in the Lord, and praise the God of his salvation.

About this time, he joined the Methodist Society in London; and whenever he was in town, he availed himself of the means of grace, especially that of class meetings, which he very highly esteemed. From the time of his conversion to God, he became truly exemplary for Christian piety. He walked cheerfully, and valiantly in the path of piety. He closely followed his Master, denying himself, and bearing his daily cross.

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CHAPTER 3

Begins to exhort sinners to repentance -- Success -- Intense devotion to study, preparatory to the ministry -- Extract of letter to Mr. Wesley Offer and acceptance of title to holy orders -- Ordination -- Frequently preaches -- His first sermon at Atcham Church -- Extract of a letter -- Refused permission to preach to French prisoners -- Extract from his letters -- Deep piety.

Shortly after he found peace with God, he was pressed in spirit to exhort others to seek the same blessing. This he began to do a considerable time before he was ordained. And even his first labors of love were not in vain. He was by no means master of the English language, particularly with regard to the pronunciation of it; yet the earnestness with which he spoke, and the unspeakably tender affection to poor, undone sinners, which breathed in every word and gesture, drew multitudes of people to hear him; and by the blessing of God, his word made so deep an impression on their hearts, that few went away empty.

It is uncertain at what period after his arrival in England, that Mr. Fletcher first meditated taking orders. He had pursued those studies which are generally regarded as preparatory to such a step; but probably did not determine on it, until after he had obtained an experimental knowledge the favor of God. This he found during his second year's residence in Shropshire. Nor did he, even at this time, fully decide on the course which he would pursue; but continued in a state of suspense nearly two years. During this period, he was much occupied in making preparation for the service of the sanctuary, that if he ever should be called to engage in this important work, he might be furnished for it. And thinking that he had not sufficient leisure for the prosecution of his design, he made it an invariable rule to sit up two whole nights in each week. These he devoted to reading, meditation, and prayer.

Several considerations prevented his entering at once upon the work of the sacred office. He believed himself unfurnished for it, and trembled at the thought of running before he was sent. Among the friends, whom he consulted on the occasion, was the Rev. Mr. Wesley. The following paragraphs are extracted from a letter written to Mr. Wesley in November, 1756: -- "Since I came to England, I have been called outwardly three times, to go into orders -- but something has always blasted the designs of my friends; and in this, I have often admired the goodness of God, who prevented me from rushing at once into that important employment. Before, I was afraid, but now, I trembled to meddle with holy things, and resolved to work out my salvation privately, without engaging in a way of life, which required so much more of grace and gifts, than I was conscious I possessed.

"I am in suspense; on one side my heart tells me, I must try, and tells me so, whenever I feel any degree of the love of God and man; on the other, I see so plainly my want of gifts, and especially that soul of all the labors of a minister, Love, -- continual, universal, flaming love, that my confidence disappears."

His patron was very desirous that he should receive ordination, and promised to help him to a settlement. Another gentleman, comparatively a stranger to Mr. Fletcher, made him a similar offer; and a clergyman who was an utter stranger to him, of his own accord, gave him the title of curate to one of his livings. He had also promises of preferment; but these rather hindered than hastened his ordination, as he was very fearful of being influenced by unworthy motives.

At length his reluctance was overcome, and he determined to offer himself a candidate for holy orders. He was accepted, and ordained deacon on the sixth of April, 1757, and priest on the thirteenth of the same month. The service was performed by the bishop of Bangor, in the Chapel Royal, at St. James, London.

On the same day in which he was ordained priest, he assisted Mr. Wesley in the administration of the Lord's Supper, at the West Street chapel. He was now doubly diligent in preaching the word, wherever the providence of God opened a door, to proclaim the everlasting Gospel. He frequently preached not only in English, but likewise in French, his native language; of which he was allowed by competent judges to be a complete master.

From this time, till he took the direct care of souls, he used to reside in London during the session of the parliament, and the rest of the year he spent in the instruction of his pupils, at Fern Hall, in Shropshire. He remained in London a few weeks after his ordination, and then returned with Mr. Hill's family to the country.

About three weeks after his return from London, he was invited to preach in the parish church. An intimate friend who heard him, said, "His text was, James iv, 4, 'Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of this world is enmity against God?' The congregation stood amazed, and gaped upon him as if he had been a monster. But to me, he appeared as a messenger from heaven. It was not soon, that he was invited to preach again in Atcham church. But he was invited to preach in other churches in the neighborhood. He wrote all the sermons which he delivered in churches. But I doubt whether he preached six times in the six months which he spent in the country. On my telling him, I wished he had more opportunities of preaching in this unenlightened part of the land, he answered, 'The will of God be done; I am in his hands. And if he does not call me to so much public duty, I have the more time for study, prayer, and praise.' "

The following extract from a letter to a friend, refers to the same subject: --

"I thank you for your encouraging observations; I want them, and use them, by the grace of God. When I received yours, I had not one opportunity of preaching, so incensed were all the clergy against me. One, however, let me have the use of his church -- the Abbey Church at Shrewsbury. I preached in the forenoon, with some degree of the demonstration of the Spirit. The congregation was very numerous, and I believe one half, at least, desired to hear me again. But the minister would not let me have the pulpit any more. The next Sunday, the minister of a neighboring parish, lying a dying, I was sent for to officiate for him. He died a few days after, and the chief man of the parish offered to make interest that I might succeed him. But I could not consent. The next Sunday, I preached at Shrewsbury again, but in another church. The next day, I set out for Bristol, and was much refreshed among the brethren. As I returned, I called at New Kingswood. The minister offering

me his church, I preached to a numerous congregation, gathered in half an hour's notice. I think the seed thus sown will not be lost."

At this time, there were many French prisoners on parole at Tunbridge. They gave Mr. Fletcher an invitation to preach to them in their own language, which he readily accepted. Many appeared to be deeply affected, and earnestly requested that he would preach to them every Sabbath. They were advised to present a petition to the bishop of London, asking his consent. They did so, and (who would have expected it?) the good bishop peremptorily rejected their petition. A singular circumstance followed. Within a few months, after this, the bishop died of a cancer in his mouth. The reader may make his own inferences.

When he returned from London this year, he had more frequent invitations to preach in the neighboring churches. These opportunities he faithfully improved. Some extracts from his letters, written while in London, in the spring of 1759, will show what was the subsequent state of his mind. Humility and fervency of soul breathe in every sentence.

"It seems to me, that I am an unprofitable weight upon the earth. I want to hide myself from all. I tremble when the Lord favors me with a sight of myself. Tomorrow, I preach at West Street with all the feelings of a Jonah. O would to God, I might be attended with success!

"With a heart bowed down with grief, and eyes bathed with tears, occasioned by our late heavy loss, I mean the death of Mr. Walsh, I take my pen, to pray you to intercede for me. What! that sincere, laborious, zealous servant of God! Was he saved only as by fire, and was not his prayer heard, till the twelfth hour was just expiring! O where shall I appear, who am but an unprofitable servant? Would to God, I might pass the rest of my days in crying, Lord, have mercy upon me! Lord, remember me now thou art in thy kingdom.

"I have lately seen so much weakness in my heart, both as a Christian, and as a minister, that I know not which is the most to be pitied, the man, the believer, or the preacher. Could I, at last, be truly humbled, and continue so always, I should esteem myself happy in making this discovery."

After spending the usual time in London, he returned to Shropshire. Having fewer calls to public duty, he enjoyed his beloved retirement, and gave himself up to study, meditation, and prayer, and walking closely with God. Indeed, his whole life was a life of devotion; and so anxious was he to maintain communion with God, that he sometimes said, "I would not move from my seat, without lifting my heart to God." "Wherever we met," observes an intimate friend, "if we were alone, his first salute was, 'Do I meet you praying?' If we were conversing on any point of divinity, when we were in the depth of our discourse, he would often break off abruptly and ask, 'Where are our hearts now?' If ever the misconduct of an absent person was mentioned, his usual reply was, 'Let us pray for him.'"

THE LIFE OF JOHN FLETCHER
By
An Anonymous Friend of Sabbath Schools

CHAPTER 4

Mr. Fletcher assists Mr. Chambers, vicar of Madeley -- Is offered, and accepted the living of Madeley -- Character of the people -- Zeal, faithfulness, opposition, and partial success -- Anecdote -- Much discouraged -- Anecdote -- Success -- -Opposition -- Awful death of two opposers -- Letter -- Catholic spirit -- Anecdote of the clerk of Brecon church.

Near the close of the summer of 1759, Mr. Fletcher was frequently desired to assist Mr. Chambers, the vicar of Madeley; at other times, he was requested to perform the whole of Divine service for him. On these occasions, he contracted an affection for the people of Madeley, which increased to the day of his death.

In September, 1760, Mr. Chambers was preferred to another parish, and the pastoral charge of Madeley was offered to Mr. Fletcher. In a letter written at this time to the Rev. Charles Wesley, he refers to his call to Madeley, and after asking advice, he says, "Remember me in all your prayers, that if this matter be not of the Lord, the enmity of the bishop of Litchfield, who must countersign my testimonials; the threats of the chaplain of the bishop of Hereford, who was a witness to my preaching at West Street; the objection drawn from my not being naturalized, or some other obstacle, may prevent the kind intentions of Mr. Hill."

As the friends, whom he consulted on the occasion, made no objection to his proceeding, he accepted the vicarage of Madeley in preference to another of twice its pecuniary value. He was now at leisure to attend to all the duties of such a station, as his pupils had gone to the university. He embraced this charge as the object of his peculiar care, and most tender affection. As Madeley was the place of his choice, so it was a place to which he was peculiarly adapted, and for the reformation of which, he appears to have been designed by the providence of God. Excepting that Madeley was celebrated for its extensive iron works, it was remarkable for little else than the ignorance and profanity of its inhabitants. Here respect toward man, was as rarely to be observed, as piety toward God. Here too, the Sabbath day was openly profaned, and the most holy things were contemptuously trodden under foot; even the restraints of decency were violently broken through, and the forms of religion were held up as matter of ridicule. Such was the general character of the people, among whom Mr. Fletcher was to preach the Gospel. He settled here in 1760.

Immediately upon his settlement at Madeley, he entered upon the duties of his station, with an extraordinary degree of earnestness and zeal. He saw the difficulties of his situation, and the reproaches to which he should be exposed by a conscientious discharge of his obligations; but feeling the responsibility of his station, and greatly concerned for the welfare of his people, he set his face, like a flint, against all who might oppose the truth, or the grace of God. He now declared the whole counsel of God, both from his pulpit, on the Sabbath, and very frequently in private houses on the evenings of week days. He was as diligent in the more private, but not less important duties of his office. He maintained a daily and Scriptural intercourse with his people, and taught them from

house to house, as their various states and every varying circumstances required. In attention to the poor, and in visiting the sick, and the afflicted, he was exemplary and indefatigable. If called for at any hour of the night, at any season of the year, in any kind of weather, even the most severe and uncomfortable, he was ready at a moment's notice to visit the sick and dying, and to offer to them the consolations of the Gospel of peace.

Mr. Fletcher was very bold and persevering in his labors to effect the reformation and salvation of his parishioners. At this time, it was a common practice for the youth of both sexes to meet together at stated times, for what was regarded as amusement and pleasure. Their recreations usually continued from evening till morning, and consisted in dancing, reveling, drunkenness, and obscenity. Their licentious assemblies he considered as a disgrace to the Christian name, and determined to exert his ministerial authority for their total suppression. He has frequently burst in upon these disorderly companies with a holy indignation, making war upon Satan in places peculiarly appropriated to his service. He was successful in some degree. In one instance a man treated him with ridicule and gross abuse; but he was shortly after constrained to cast himself at Mr. Fletcher's feet and solicit his prayers. This man afterward became an exemplary Christian.

Those who endeavored to hide themselves from him, were pursued by him to every corner of the parish: -- early and late, in season and out of season, he exhorted and entreated them to flee from the wrath to come. Some made it an excuse for not attending the Church service on Sunday mornings, that they could not wake early enough to get their families ready. He provided a remedy for this evil. Taking a bell in his hand, he set out at five o'clock, every Sunday morning for some months, and went round the most distant parts of the parish, inviting all the inhabitants to the house of God.

But notwithstanding all his labor, for some time he saw but little fruit of his pains; so discouraging were his prospects, that he was more than once in doubt whether he had not mistaken his place. He wrote to a friend at this time: -- "A few days ago, I was violently tempted to quit Madeley; the spirit of a Jonah had so seized upon my heart, that I had the insolence to murmur against the Lord; but the storm is now happily calmed, at least for a season."

The following circumstance occurred at a time when he was under great discouragement, arising from a want of success in his labors: -- a multitude of people had flocked together at a funeral. At the close of an exhortation which Mr. Fletcher gave on the occasion, a man was so greatly offended, that he broke out into scurrilous and menacing language. But notwithstanding all his struggling against it, the word fastened upon his heart. At first he roared aloud; but soon he wept like a child. Not long after, he came to Mr. Fletcher, and, in the most humble manner, asked pardon for his past outrageous behavior, and begged an interest in his prayers. It was but a short time before the poor broken-hearted sinner was filled with joy unspeakable, and earnestly exhorted others to seek the favor of God.

In addition to other embarrassments, Mr. Fletcher was not a little depressed by the smallness of his congregations. In this respect also, he had reason to be encouraged. Within a year after his settlement he wrote, "When I first came to Madeley, I was greatly mortified and discouraged by the smallness of my congregations; but now, I thank God, things are altered, and last Sunday, I had the pleasure of seeing some in the church yard who could not get into the church."

In a short time, the congregation so greatly increased, that the church was very much crowded. The church wardens now began to speak of hindering strangers from coming, and also of repelling them from the Lord's Supper, but Mr. Fletcher withstood them and prevailed.

Mr. Fletcher did not confine his preaching to his church, nor his labors to own parish. He frequently preached at Madeley Wood, and Coulbrook Dale, two villages in his parish. He also formed a little society six miles from Madeley, where he preached two or three times a week, at five o'clock in the morning. And for many years he regularly preached at places from eight to sixteen miles distant. In these labors of love he met with much opposition, and not a few snares were laid to entangle him.

One Sunday, after he had performed the usual service at his church, he prepared to attend his regular appointment, to preach at Madeley Wood. But just as he was about starting, notice was brought, that a child was to be buried. This notice should have been given before. The delay thus occasioned prevented his going to the Wood; and here the providence of God appeared. For at that very time, many of the savage colliers were baiting a bull very near the place in which he was to preach: and having had plenty of drink, they had all agreed to bait the parson as soon as he should appear. A part of them were to pull him off his horse, and others were to set the dogs upon him. But in the mean time, the bull broke loose and threw down the booth in which the gentlemen were drinking, and the people fearing for themselves the evil they had intended for him, were all dispersed; while the serious friends, who had met for worship, were waiting in quietness and safety. But drunken colliers were not the only persons who opposed and persecuted him. Several of the gentlemen of his own parish, and some of the neighboring clergymen and magistrates set themselves against him from the commencement of his pastoral labors among them; but they were unable to accomplish their design of removing him from his charge. An extract follows, taken from a letter to the Rev. Mr. Wesley: "Discouragements follow one another with very little intermission. You cannot well imagine how much the animosity of my parishioners is heightened, and with what boldness it discovers itself against me, because I preach against drunkenness, shows, and bull baiting. The publicans and maltmen will not forgive me; they think that to preach against drunkenness, and to cut their purse is the same thing." At Madeley Wood there was a small company of well-disposed persons, who met for worship in a house which was built upon a rock. This was called the Rock church. Of them he says, in the letter just quoted, "A magistrate proceeded so far as to threaten me and all my flock of the Rock church with imprisonment. We were to have been mobbed with a drum last Tuesday, but their captain, a papist, behaved himself so very ill, that they were ashamed of him, and are made peaceable for the present." In another letter, written near this time, (August, 1762,) he observed, "The opposition made to my ministry increases. A young clergyman, who lives in Madeley Wood, where he has great influence, has openly declared war against me, by pasting a paper on the church door; in which he charges me with rebellion, schism, and being a disturber of the public peace. He puts himself at the head of the gentlemen of the parish, (as they term themselves) and is determined to put the conventicle act in force against me.

"A few days ago, the widow who lives in the Bock church, and a young man who read and prayed in my absence, were taken up. I attended them before the justice, and the young clergyman and his troop were present They called me Jesuit, &c., and the justice tried to frighten me. I tried to plead my cause as well as I could; but seeing that he was determined to hear no reason, I told him he must

do as he pleased, and that if the act in question concerned us, we were prepared to suffer all its rigors. But what is worst of all, their false witnesses offer to prove upon oath that I am a liar; and some of my followers, as they are called, have dishonored their profession, to the great joy of our adversaries."

The justice above mentioned raved in vain; his associates being of opinion that this affair did not come within their jurisdiction.

A striking circumstance occurred in his parish, of which he gave an account in a letter, dated January 19, 1766. "This evening I have buried one of the warmest opposers of my ministry, a stout, strong young man, aged twenty-four years. About three months ago he came to the church yard with a corpse, but refused to come into the church. When the burial was over, I went to him and mildly expostulated with him. His constant answer was, that he had bound himself never to come to church while I was there; adding, that he would take the consequences, &c. Seeing I gained nothing, I left him, saying, with uncommon warmth, (though as far as I can remember, without the least touch of resentment,) I am clear of your blood; henceforth it is upon your own head; you will not come to church on your legs, prepare to come on your neighbors' shoulders. He wasted from that time, and to my great surprise has been buried upon the spot where we were when the conversation passed between us. When I visited him in his sickness, he seemed as tame as a wolf in a trap."

A second circumstance, somewhat similar, is related by one who knew several members of the family of the individual to whom it relates.

"One Sunday morning, after Divine service, Mr. _____, a gentleman farmer insulted Mr. Fletcher very grossly as he came out of the church, evincing great enmity against a faithful ministry and genuine piety. Before Mr. Fletcher concluded his sermon in the afternoon, he told the congregation, he had a powerful impression upon his mind, that before the next Sabbath, the Lord would display a signal mark of his displeasure against the enemies of his cause and truth. The week drew almost to a conclusion and nothing remarkable happened. But on the Saturday evening Mr. _____ was returning from the market in a state of intoxication, when he fell from his horse, and instantly expired on the spot."

As Mr. Fletcher had the spiritual welfare of his flock greatly at heart, and as he ever entertained a mean opinion of himself as a preacher, he was accustomed to invite to his pulpit the ministers, both of the Established Church and of other orthodox denominations. In a letter dated May, 1766, he says to a friend, "The coming of Mr. Wesley's preachers into my parish gives me no uneasiness. As I am sensible that every body does better and of course is more acceptable than myself, I should be sorry to deprive any one of a blessing; and I rejoice that the work of God goes on by any instrument, and in any place." To one of Mr. Wesley's preachers, whom he had invited to preach in his parish, he said, "We need not make two parties. I know but one heaven below [on earth -- DVM], and that is Jesus's love; let us both go and abide in it, and when we have gathered as many as we can to go with us, too many will still stay behind."

Nor did he refuse the assistance of such as differed from him in some points of doctrine, as appears by an extract of a letter to the Rev. Mr. Whitefield. "Last Sunday se'nnight [sic], captain

Scott preached a sermon to my congregation, which though preached upon my horseblock, was more blessed than a hundred of those I preach in my pulpit. If you should ever favor Shropshire with your presence, you may have the captain's, or the parson's pulpit at your option. Many ask whether you will not come to have some fruit here also; what must I answer them?."

With a view to promote the work of God, Mr. Fletcher made excursions not only to the neighboring towns, but to more distant places. On one occasion he exchanged pulpits for a few Sabbaths with Mr. Sellon of Breedon. While he was here people of various classes from all the adjacent parishes flocked to hear him. The clerk being offended at seeing such crowds attend, because it caused a little more labor in cleaning the church, determined that persons from other parishes should not be admitted without paying a penny each. For this purpose he placed himself at the church door, and began to collect the money from them as they passed in. Mr. Fletcher was informed of the circumstance, and hastened toward the church, saying, "I'll stop his proceeding." The clerk saw him coming and left the post he had taken and went to his desk. At the conclusion of the service, Mr. Fletcher said to the congregation, "I have not felt my spirit so moved these sixteen years last past as I have done today; I have heard that the clerk of this parish has demanded, and has actually received money from divers strangers before he would permit them to enter the church. I desire all who have in this way paid money for hearing the Gospel, will come to me, and I will return what they have paid, and as to this iniquitous clerk, his money perish with him."

THE LIFE OF JOHN FLETCHER
By
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CHAPTER 5

Journey to the continent -- Debate with an infidel -- The interesting Genoese -- Leaves Genoa and visits the Huguenots -- Anecdote -- Passes over he Appian Way -- Arrives at Nyon and preaches with success -- Returns to England.

In the spring of the year 1770, Mr. Fletcher, in company with his friend Mr. Ireland, took a journey to his native country, and traveled extensively through France and Italy.

Mr. Ireland has given a short sketch of this tour from which we make a few extracts: --

"At that time a popish priest resided in his parish, who attempted to mislead the poor people. Mr. Fletcher therefore throughout this journey attended the sermons of the Roman Catholic clergy, visited their convents and monasteries, and conversed with the most serious among those with whom he met, that he might thoroughly know their sentiments concerning spiritual religion. And he was so very particular in making his observations respecting the gross and absurd practices of the priests and other clergy, especially while we were in Italy, that we were in no small danger of our lives. He wished to attend the pope's chapel at Rome, but I would not consent to accompany him, till I had obtained a promise from him, that he would forbear to speak by way of censure or reproof of what he saw or heard.

"He came into company with a great many men of science and learning, with whom he conversed freely on Gospel truths, which most of them opposed with violence. A few heard and were edified."

During this journey he met with a traveler who was an infidel, a man of much information and refinement, and a strenuous opposer of the Christian religion. This gentleman no sooner learned that he was sitting in company with a zealous defender of Divine revelation, than confiding in his own superiority, he carelessly threw down the gauntlet by ridiculing the Christian faith. Mr. Fletcher immediately accepted the challenge with modest assurance, and the conversation between these two able disputants soon became intensely interesting. Every argument on either side was proposed with the greatest possible caution, and every proposition was examined with the nicest accuracy. After the contest had continued several hours without intermission, the gentleman became impatient at his want of success, while his calmer opponent exposed and confuted the tenets which he had always endeavored to maintain.

This debate was continued by adjournments for nearly a week. The arguments of celebrated writers on both sides were produced and examined. Mr. Fletcher repeatedly overcame his antagonist, whose arguments became more and more languid and ineffectual toward the close of the controversy, and who regularly lost his temper and his cause together. In the course of this debate, Mr. Fletcher took a view of the Christian's enviable life, his consolation in trouble, his tranquillity in danger, together with his superiority to all the evils of life, and the horrors of death, and interspersed his

remarks with many affectionate admonitions and powerful persuasions to a rational dependence on the truths of the Gospel.

The infidel conceived so high an opinion of his opponent's character, that he never after mentioned his name, but with peculiar veneration and regard. And as a proof of his sincere regard, on meeting with Mr. Fletcher eight years afterward, he invited him to visit his residence in Provence, where be lived in affluence and ease. Here he entertained Mr. Fletcher in the most hospitable manner, showing him every possible degree of respect, and listened with great attention to his conversation on spiritual subjects.

At another time he met with a young Genoese, who, taking the same rout, politely offered his company; the offer was as politely received. After a short conversation, Mr. Fletcher discovered that the young man had the skeptical notions of the day. He now beheld the youth with a mixture of compassion and hope, and secretly determined to improve the favorable opportunity which he now enjoyed, in endeavoring to promote his spiritual welfare.

An unexpected detention by adverse winds, gave him the privilege of conversing with him. This he did in the most free and affectionate manner. At first the young man maintained his sentiments with a degree of warmth, and a strong persuasion that any attempt to refute them would be ineffectual; but in the course of a few hours he was unexpectedly staggered by the forcible arguments of his wiser opponent. At the end of two days he frankly acknowledged himself vanquished; and expressed a desire that the controversy might be turned into a liberal inquiry, respecting the nature of revealed religion.

The immediate result of Mr. Fletcher's judicious and Scriptural instruction was, that the young man was constrained to acknowledge the natural depravity of his heart, and the darkness of his mind; he regretted his former inattention to the most momentous concerns, and lamented with many tears that he had so long wandered in the mazes of error and delusion. From this time he desired to be present at morning and evening prayers when Mr. Fletcher usually expounded a portion of Scripture suited to his spiritual state. The religious impressions thus made, not only continued, but by the blessing of God, they deepened daily till their arrival at Genoa. Here Mr. Fletcher had the happiness of observing every apparent token of a real and permanent change in the character and deportment of his youthful and interesting friend.

While he remained at Genoa he endeavored to establish him in the faith of the Gospel; he taught him the practice of its duties, and invited him to the full enjoyment of its privileges; He set before him the trials and difficulties which would probably attend his spiritual course, together with the advantages and consolations which must necessarily follow a religious life. He guarded him against the devices of an ensnaring world, by showing him that its riches were uncertain, its honors trifling, its support feeble, its friendship inconstant; and entreated him to remember that the friend of the world is an enemy to God. And now being called away from Genoa, after commending his young friend to God in solemn prayer, he took a most affectionate leave of him, and went on his way rejoicing.

While on this tour through France, Mr. Fletcher was anxious to visit some Huguenots who resided in the Sevennes Mountains. -- These were the descendants of the Protestants, who, the seventeenth century suffered in a most violent and barbarous persecution by the minions of the wicked and intolerant Church of Rome. Although the journey was arduous, no argument could induce him to give up his resolution of making it on foot. He said to his friend, in reply to his remarks on the subject, "Shall I make a visit on horseback, and at ease, to those poor cottagers whose fathers were hunted along yonder rocks like partridges upon the mountains? No; in order to secure a more friendly reception among them, I will visit them under the plainest appearance, and with my staff in my hand."

Accordingly he set out alone on this Christian expedition; and, after traveling till it was nearly dark, he came to a small house, where he requested the favor of being permitted to sit up in a chair till morning. After some hesitation, the head of the family consented to receive him. Mr. Fletcher soon entered into conversation with his host and his wife, who soon became so charmed with him, that they considered the richest provisions which their house afforded, as too mean to be set before him.

Before they retired to rest, he proposed to engage in prayer with them; and, while he was pouring out his fervent supplications before God, the family around him were filled with admiration and melted to tears. Early in the morning he renewed his exhortations to the family, and again with them solemnly addressed the throne of grace. Immediately after which he took an affectionate leave of them, and left the whole household in a state of astonishment and concern. The above account was given by the cottager, who with his family belonged to the Romish Church.

Pursuing his journey, he reached a town which was inhabited by Protestants. Here he was received by the pious minister and his people with open arms. While he tarried with them he exercised his ministry with freedom and success. He conversed with their elders, admonished the youth, visited the sick, and exhorted and instructed them from house to house.

While on his journey through a part of Italy, as they approached the Appian Way, he directed the driver to stop before they entered upon it. He then ordered the carriage door to be opened, assuring his fellow traveler, that his heart would not suffer him to ride over that ground upon which the Apostle Paul had formerly walked chained to a soldier for having preached the everlasting Gospel. As soon as he had set his foot upon this old Roman road, he took off his hat, and walking on with his eyes raised toward heaven, he returned thanks to God in a most fervent manner, for that Divine light, those Gospel truths, and the influence of the Holy Spirit, which were continued to the present day. He then adverted to the life, experience, travels, labors and sufferings of the great apostle. His remarks were continued for some time, sweetly intermingled with prayer and praise.

On his arrival at his native town, he was waited upon by the clergy who severally pressed him to favor them with his services during his stay in the place. The day after his arrival, being the Sabbath, he addressed his countrymen in an admirable discourse, the result of much prayer and meditation. The sermon was interesting in its matter, and was delivered in such a manner as to induce profound attention and universal admiration. The subject of this sermon was, the faith once delivered unto the saints.

During his stay at Nyon, he preached in different churches, and such was the public opinion of his piety and talents, that multitudes of people of every description flocked to hear him. His labors were so blessed of God, that many despisers of revelation were confounded; formal professors were touched with the power of true religion, and the careless and profligate were awakened. Among the seals of his ministry was a young man who immediately dedicated himself to the work of the ministry, and subsequently became the pastor of the Protestant Church at Lyons.

The benefit of his services was evidenced by the numerous applications which he received for private religious instruction. And the grateful sense which his countrymen entertained of those labors was fully expressed by their affectionate concern at his departure from among them. Scores crowded around his carriage, anxious to obtain a last word or look; and not a few followed him two miles out of town before they had the resolution to tear themselves away from him.

Mr. Fletcher returned to England about the middle of July, 1770, having been absent five months.

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CHAPTER 6

Chosen Principal of Lady Huntingdon's College -- Honorable testimonial of his usefulness -- Resignation and reasons for it -- Takes a prominent part in the controversy relative to Mr. Wesley's Minutes -- Conduct of his former friends -- Writes and publishes the "Checks to Antinomianism" -- Rejects offered preferment -- Letters -- Occasions of the loss of his health -- Travels with Mr. Wesley to regain it -- At the Hot Wells -- State of mind -- Preaches his farewell sermon at Madeley -- Physicians despair of his recovery -- Extracts from pastoral letters -- Ill health continues -- Interview with dissenting minister -- Extract from a letter.

A short time previous to his tour on the continent, the countess of Huntingdon erected a seminary at Trevecca in Wales, for the purpose of educating pious young men for the ministry. Such as entered were allowed to stay three years, during which time they received their education, board, and clothing, gratis. From the high opinion which the countess had of Mr. Fletcher's piety, learning, and abilities for the office, she invited him to take the superintendency of the college. He was not expected to reside at Trevecca, as his duty to his parish would not admit of his absence from it; but he was to attend often as he could conveniently, to give advice in the appointment of masters; on the admission and exclusion of students; to oversee their studies and conduct; to assist their piety, and to judge of their qualifications for the ministry. Mr. Fletcher highly approved of the institution from two considerations. First, No one was to be admitted but such as gave satisfactory evidence of experimental religion. Secondly, When they were prepared for it, they were at liberty to enter the ministry wherever Providence should open a door. He readily complied with the invitation, and accepted the charge without fee or reward, from the sole motive of being useful in training up persons for the important office of preaching the Gospel. The institution was organized and a number of students were admitted, and such was their progress in learning and piety, and such also their talents for the sacred office, that the most flattering hopes were entertained of their usefulness, and the success of the seminary.

Mr. Fletcher visited them frequently, and was received as an angel of God. The Rev. Mr. Benson, at that time principal instructor, says of him, "He was revered, he was loved, he was almost adored: and that not only by every student, but by every member of the family." Beside paying the necessary attention to the literary concerns of the college, he was zealous and unwearied in his exertions to promote the spiritual interest of the students, family, and neighbors. His visits were, in a very eminent degree, seasons of refreshing from the presence of the Lord. A change however took place in the sentiments of the foundress, and resulted in her excluding from it, and all its benefits, all such as differed from her ladyship; and thus the institution, heretofore catholic in its design, and liberal in its benefits, became decidedly sectarian in its character. "A bird of passage," as he was termed by Mr. Fletcher, had taken an ungenerous advantage of the absence of the president and principal instructor, and had taught and insisted on some doctrinal peculiarities, which occasioned discord and debate where all had been harmony and peace. In a letter dated March, 1771, after noticing the unhappy state of things at the college which he had just visited, together with some violent measures

which had been recently pursued, Mr. Fletcher farther remarks, "I concluded by observing, that after such a step on my part, and such a declaration on her ladyship's, as an honest man, I could no longer stay in the college; I took my leave of it, wishing my lady might find a minister to preside over it less inefficient, and more willing to go certain lengths into what appeared to me to be party spirit, than what I am. I advised her, as her college was Calvinistic, to get a Calvinistic president for it. Last Friday I left them all in peace, the servant, but no more the president of the college. My lady behaved with great condescension and candor toward me in the affair.

In the year 1770, Mr. Wesley had published in his minutes of the conference, some conversations which had passed between himself and the preachers in connection with him. The propositions contained in those conversations were exceedingly offensive to many persons. They were denounced as, "horrible, abominable, and subversive of the pillar on which the Church stands or with which it falls." The Hon. and Rev. Mr. Shirley sent abroad the famous "Circular Letter," in which the clergymen and principal pious persons of all denominations were invited to assemble at Bristol during the next session of Mr. Wesley's conference, when they were to proceed in a body to the said conference, and insist on a formal recantation of the "heresy" contained in the minutes. As Mr. Fletcher judged that the Churches throughout Christendom were fast verging toward Antinomianism, he thought the sentiments contained in those minutes ought to be confirmed rather than revoked. And as he had now retired to his parish, he had leisure for the work; therefore after much prayer and reflection upon the subject, he resolved to write in defense of them. In reference to this matter he said in a letter to a friend, dated August 24, 1771: -- "How much water may rush out of a little opening? What are our dear lady's jealousies come to? Ah poor college! Their conduct and charge of heresy, &c., among other things, have stirred me up to write in defense of the minutes. I have this morning received a most kind letter from Mr. Shirley, whom I pity much now. Methinks I dream when I reflect I have written on controversy! The last subject I thought I should have meddled with. I expect to be roughly handled on the account. As long as his health permitted him to write at all, Mr. Fletcher chiefly employed his pen on controversial subjects; an employment in which he at first engaged with reluctance, which he never loved, and which he was frequently disposed to relinquish, had a sense of duty permitted him to do it, but which he never repented having undertaken, although he encountered much opposition, and suffered much reproach while thus engaged. He lost valuable friends from each of the two parties who were interested in this controversy. Some who had previously loved him as their own souls, were so vexed and chagrined on seeing their favorite sentiments undermined and overthrown, that they poured forth abusive language in a very liberal manner. A young man, who, while a student at Trevecca, had loved and revered Mr. Fletcher as a father, after using many reproachful expressions, added, as a finishing stroke, "If you die in the faith your book maintains, you will be shut out of heaven."

During this controversy, Mr. Fletcher wrote and published a variety of pieces on the various points at issue between himself and his opponents. These pieces have been published, in several editions, both in Europe and in America. They are extensively known in this country as "Fletcher's Checks to Antinomianism," and are justly and highly esteemed, as containing an unanswered and unanswerable defense of some of the prominent truths of the Christian religion.

Near this time he also wrote and published a few short pieces in reference to the contest with the American colonies. One of these, having passed through several hands, was at length presented to

the king. An officer was immediately commissioned to ask Mr. Fletcher whether any preferment in the Church would be acceptable, or whether the Lord Chancellor could do him any service? Mr. Fletcher replied, "I want nothing but more grace." An answer worthy of this man of God.

The testimony of his friends, as well as the letters which he wrote at different times, make it evident that he suffered no declension in piety, meekness, or benevolence, during his controversial career. A few extracts from his letters are given below. The first is dated September 21, 1773.

"I see life is so short, and it passes away with such rapidity, that I should be glad to spend it in solemn prayer; but it is necessary the one should have some exterior occupation. The chief thing is to employ ourselves profitably. The circumstances I am in obliged me to employ myself in writing a little. O that I may be enabled to do it to the glory of God! Let us love this good God, who hath so loved the world that he gave his only begotten on, that we might not perish, but have everlasting life. The Lord teaches me four lessons; the first is, to be thankful that I am not in hell; the second is, to become nothing before him; the third is to receive the gift of God -- the person of Jesus; and the fourth is, to feel my want of the Spirit of Jesus, and to wait for it. Let us go together to the school of Jesus, and learn to be meek and lowly of heart."

In May, 1774, he wrote to the Rev. Joseph Benson, "I shall be glad to see the productions of your pen. I hope they will add to my little stock of truth and love. Let us believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. Let us love one another, serve our generation, and hopefully wait for the glorious revelation of the Son of God."

In closing another letter to Mr. Benson, he said. "Let us see that we do not so look at our little publications, or to other people, as to forget that Christ is our object, our sun, and our shield. To his inspiration, comfort, and protection, I recommend your soul, and the labors of your heart, tongue, and pen, to his blessing; entreating you to beg at the throne of grace, all the wisdom and grace needful for your friend."

While Mr. Fletcher presided over the college, he took frequent journeys to Trevecca. These he made in all weathers and at all seasons of the year; and he thereby greatly impaired his constitution. Beside this, his public and private labors were excessive. Not satisfied with the service usually rendered to a people, he visited his flock in every part of his large and populous parish. In this work he was engaged early and late; he neither regarded heat nor cold, nor rain nor snow, whether on horse-back or on foot. But his constitution was still farther weakened, and more seriously injured, by his intense application to study; and this he frequently continued from fourteen to sixteen hours in a day, with scarcely any intermission. And what was still more, he did not allow himself the food which was necessary to support nature. Excepting when he had company, he seldom took any regular meals; but two or three times in twenty-four hours he ate some bread and cheese, and fruit, or drank a little milk, and immediately resumed his studies. He was afterward convinced of the impropriety of his well-meant, but injudicious self denial.

In March, 1774, he wrote to Mr. Ireland, O! how life goes! I walked, now I gallop into eternity. The bowl of life goes rapidly down the steep hill of time. Let us be wise, let us trim our lamps and continue to give ourselves to him who bought us."

Mr. Fletcher was made sensible that he had gone to an extreme in his intense application to study and writing, and that the preservation of any degree of health, would depend on relaxation and exercise in open air. He wrote to a friend in February, 1775: -- "I may make an excursion somewhere this spring; where it will be, I do not know, perhaps into eternity; for I dare not depend on tomorrow."

Mr. Wesley now gave him an invitation to travel with him to visit the societies in different parts of the kingdom. In speaking on this subject, Mr. Wesley said, "His health being more than ever impaired by a violent cough, attended with spitting of blood, and having frequently seen the surprising effects of constant exercise, together with change of air, I told him nothing was so likely to restore his health as a long journey. I therefore proposed his taking a journey of several months, through England and Scotland. We set out early in the spring, and traveled by moderate journeys, suited to his strength, which gradually increased, eleven or twelve hundred miles."

After he had traveled a part of this distance he returned to his parish for a few weeks, and resumed his usual studies and labors, which speedily increased his disorder and induced alarming symptoms. In a letter written at this time, he asks, "Are you ripening as fast for the grave as I am? How should we lay out every moment for God! Thank God I look at our last enemy with great composure. I enjoy uninterrupted peace in the midst of my trials."

He spent a part of the summer at the Bristol Hot Wells, but reaped little or no benefit from the use of the waters. His disorder rather increased, and for several months he desisted from nearly all his labors. For a short time at the close of the summer, his state of health appeared encouraging, but it soon declined, and his symptoms became so decided and alarming, that his recovery was deemed impossible.

His spiritual state at this time was most enviable. He looked forward with increasing desire to the happy moment, when he should exchange the weapons of his warfare, for a crown of glory. He earnestly desired that mortality might be swallowed up of life. While he appeared to be speedily advancing toward the confines of the invisible world, he rejoiced as a long absent and weary traveler in sight of his beloved home. While the harbingers of death were apparently employed in completing their task on the body of this holy man, his soul was favored with enlarged and transporting prospects of a glorious immortality.

In the fall of this year, when about to be absent from his people, in order to travel for a few weeks with Mr. Wesley, he took his leave of them in a farewell sermon on these words, "What I shall choose I wot not. For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart and be with Christ which is far better: Nevertheless to abide in the flesh is more needful for you." This text fully expressed his own state of mind, and from it he delivered a most affecting discourse. In this sweet suspense, this man of God continued more than two years, when God heard prayer, and determined his case in favor of a longer stay with his people.

The journey which he now took was of great advantage to his health, and had he continued traveling, it might have been the means of a complete recovery; but he listened to the advice of his kind, but injudicious friends in London, and desisted from journeying. The consequence was, that

in a few weeks his bleeding at the lungs, with all his other alarming symptoms, returned, and his disease so rapidly increased that the physicians pronounced him far advanced in a true pulmonary consumption.

In December, 1776, he retired to the house of his friend, Mr. Greenwood, who resided in the vicinity of London. Here rest, silence, and seclusion from company, were strictly enjoined. His natural vivacity with his great love to God continually impelled him to speak, and no penance could have appeared to him more severe than to be debased the privilege of speaking of the goodness and love of God. While here, many persons of various ranks and conditions visited him: One of his visitors, on leaving the house, was asked what he thought of Mr. Fletcher? He replied, "I went to see a man who had one foot in the grave, but I found a man who had one foot in heaven." By the most affectionate and respectful behavior, he confirmed his love to several of his opponents who now visited him. Yet he did not give up any part of the truth for which he had publicly contended.

As Mr. Fletcher still sustained his pastoral relation to Madeley, he manifested much of interest for his parishioners. To promote their welfare, he wrote them many pastoral letters. The following extract from one of them is given as a specimen of their matter and spirit: --

"The sum of all that I have preached to you is contained in four propositions: First, Heartily repent of all your sins, original and actual. Secondly, Believe the Gospel of Christ in sincerity and truth. Thirdly, In the power which true faith gives, run with humble confidence in the way of God's commandments. Fourthly, By continuing to take up your cross and to receive the pure milk of the word, now in grace and in the knowledge of Jesus Christ. So shall you grow in peace and joy all the days f your life; and when rolling years shall be lost in eternity, you will for ever grow in bliss and heavenly glory. O what bliss! O what glory! The more nearly I consider death, the grave, judgment, and eternity, the more blessed be God, I feel that I have preached to you the truth, and that the truth is as solid as the Rock of Ages. Glory be to his Divine grace, I can say in some degree, 'Here is solid footing.' Meet at the throne of grace, and you shall meet your affectionate, unworthy, and obliged minister at the throne of glory."

Notwithstanding the directions of his physicians, Mr. Fletcher could not be induced to take the rest which was indispensable to the recovery of his health As fast as he gained any degree of strength, he spent it in writing or conversation for the spiritual advantage of others.

In April, 1777, he was removed from Newington to Bristol. At this time his health had not improved in any degree. He observed, in a letter written at this time, "I thought myself a little better last Sunday, but I have since spit more blood than I had done for weeks before. Glory be to God for every providence! His will be done in me by health or sickness, by life or death."

He remained in the neighborhood of Bristol, and used the medicinal waters with some prospect of permanent benefit. Many respectable persons visited him during this period, among whom were a number who differed from him in religious sentiments; several of these bore testimony to his deep piety; but a dissenting minister, after pressing him hard with respect to some of his opinions, at length remarked with great warmth, "Mr. Fletcher, you had better been gasping for life with an

asthma, or have had all your limbs unstrung by the palsy, than to have written those Checks." Mr. Fletcher only replied, "Sir, I wanted more love then and I do so still."

At the conclusion of the summer it was found that the means which he had been using, had produced little or no effect. It was now concluded that a sea voyage, and his own country air, was his last resort and only hope. His own opinion of his situation was expressed in one of his letters. "I sleep less and spit more blood than I did, nor can I bear the least trot of an easy horse. If this continue many days, instead of thinking to go and see my friends on the continent, I shall turn my steps to my earthly home, to be ready to lay my bones in my church yard. My prospects and ways are shut up, so that I have nothing to look to but Jesus and the grave. May I so look at them as to live in him who is my resurrection and life; and die in all the meekness of my Lord and my all!"

THE LIFE OF JOHN FLETCHER
By
An Anonymous Friend of Sabbath Schools

CHAPTER 7

Journey to France -- Sudden change in health -- Preaches -- Anecdote at Rome -- Interesting interview with the children -- Concern for his countrymen -- -Extract of a Letter -- Summoned to trial, and silenced for preaching against Sabbath breaking -- Anecdote of a dying woman and child.

About the beginning of December, Mr. Fletcher, in company with his friend Mr. Ireland and family, set out on a journey to the south of France. The journey, together with the change of climate, produced an astonishing effect. As early as the middle of January, nearly all his unfavorable symptoms had disappeared, he walked out daily, his appetite was good, and his natural color had quite returned. He continued to gain strength so as to be able to travel more than fifty miles in a day without any fatigue. During the day in which he traveled the greatest distance, he cried out to his companion, "Help me to praise the Lord for his goodness; I never expected to see this day."

Having so far recovered his health, he accepted an invitation to preach. He afterward feared that he had done wrong in making this engagement, yet when the time arrived he was assisted to preach with so much liberty and power that the whole congregation were much affected.

While on the continent he traveled through Italy and visited Rome. While here, as he and Mr. Ireland were passing along a street in a coach, they were informed that the pope was coming, and that they would be required to get out of the carriage and kneel in the street as all the people did, and that a refusal might be attended with fatal consequences." But they flatly refused to do this under any consideration, judging that the paying such honor to a man was neither better nor worse than idolatry. The coachman became greatly terrified, not knowing what to do. He however made a shift to turn aside into a narrow way. The pope passed along in an open carriage. He waved his hands as if he had been swimming, and frequently repeated these words, "God bless you all!" Mr. Fletcher was greatly moved, and longed to bear testimony against this antichrist. Nothing prevented his doing it, but his ignorance of the Italian language.

He returned to Nyon, where he enjoyed every facility for the restoration of his health. But soon after he came here, he observed, in a letter written to England, "I have recovered some strength, blessed be God, since I came to the continent, but have lately had another attack of my old complaints. However, I find myself better again, though I think it not yet advisable to speak in public."

In July, 1778, he had again partially recovered his strength. He said at that time, "I have ventured to preach once and to expound once in the church."

While riding one day, he met with some children with whom he conversed on religious subjects; some of them afterward followed him to his home; the people about the house turned them away, saying, that "Mr. Fletcher would not be troubled with children." They cried and said, They were sure

he would not say so, for he was their good brother. The next day, when he heard of the circumstance, he invited them to come and see him. They afterward came frequently, and he made them little hymns which he taught them to sing. He afterward met a hundred children at once, and preached to them in a grove and in his father's yard. Some of those children sought and found peace with God, and gave evidence of experimental piety.

During this visit to his native country, Mr. Fletcher felt the deepest interest for the salvation of his countrymen; but especially for his kinsmen and friends. For these he labored abundantly. He admonished them with the authority of a minister, and entreated them with the gentleness of a brother; mixing his admonitions and entreaties with many tears of sorrow and affection. His exertions in some instances were successful, and several of them became hopeful subjects of a work of grace.

His almost constant exertion however very much retarded his recovery. On the 15th of September, he wrote, "I have still trying, feverish nights. I am kept in peace of mind, resigned to God's will who afflicts me for my good. Though I am a bruised reed, yet I rest in him. He does not break me; yea he comforts me on every side. His grace within, and his people without, turn my trying circumstances into matters of praise."

Mr. Perronet, an acquaintance of Mr. Fletcher, visited Switzerland in December of this year, and found him in the enjoyment of tolerable health. He said of him, "His chief delight seems to be in meeting his little society of children; and as he is exceedingly fond of them, they appear to be altogether as fond of him. He seldom either walks abroad or rides out, but some of them follow him singing the hymns they have learned, and conversing with him by the way." The same gentleman observed that "the drunkards made songs about him and his little companions."

On the 2d of February, 1779, Mr. Fletcher wrote to Mr. Ireland, "I am better, thank God. You will ask me how I spend my time? I answer, I pray, have patience, rejoice, and write when I can. I hope to be able to set out for England in April or May." But on the 29th of May he wrote, "I am still weak in body, but, through the Divine mercy, am able to ride out and exhort some children. Well! the time shall come, when in a better state, we shall be able to glorify our heavenly Father. In the mean time let us do it either in the stocks of weakness or in the fire of tribulation."

The earnest entreaties of a few pious persons prevailed upon him to remain a little longer at Nyon than he had intended. Here he occasionally preached in the different churches. But in the beginning of September he was summoned before a magistrate, by whom he was sharply reproved for preaching against Sabbath breaking, and theatrical amusements. The magistrate also forbade the farther exercise of his ministerial office in Switzerland. He however continued to meet and instruct the people in a private house. The opposition thus induced was instigated by a professed minister of the Gospel! Soon after this he died very suddenly.

Near this time the following interesting circumstance occurred: Mr. Fletcher had heard of an eminently pious minister in the country, and had a great desire to see him. He accordingly set off very early one morning to visit him. When he had walked several miles, he saw a crowd of people assembled at the door of a house. On making some inquiry, he was told that, "A poor woman and

child lay a dying." He went in and found a woman who was apparently very near death. The situation of her new-born infant was but little better, it being dreadfully convulsed. The room was full of people. From that melancholy spectacle, he took occasion to show them the dreadful effects of sin; and afterward spoke much of our miserable state in consequence of the sin of our first parents. He then spoke of the second Adam, and of the blessings which we might receive through him, and added, "He is able to raise the dead! He is able to save you all from sin as well as to save these two poor objects from death. Come let us ask him to save both us and them." He then engaged in prayer, and found remarkable liberty. Presently there was a very great alteration for the better, in both the mother and child. The people were utterly amazed and stood speechless and almost senseless. While they were in this state he silently withdrew, and when they came to themselves he was gone. Many of them asked, "Who could it be " and some replied, "Certainly it was an angel."

THE LIFE OF JOHN FLETCHER
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CHAPTER 8

Returns to England -- Interview with Mr. Rankin -- Preaches at Bristol -- Arrives at Madeley -- Married to Miss Bosanquet -- Extract of a letter -- Fully restored to health -- Interest for the education of poor children -- Zeal for Sabbath schools -- Anecdote -- Remarkable incident -- Visits Dublin -- Anecdote.

Various circumstances concurred in detaining Mr. Fletcher in Switzerland until the spring of 1781. He arrived in England about the middle of April. He had quite recovered from his consumption, and his health was fully restored.

The following account of an interview which took place immediately after his arrival in England, will evince the fervor of his devotion and the warmth of his zeal for the glory of God and the prosperity of his cause. It was given by Mr. Rankin, one of the first Methodist preachers who came to this continent.

"In the year 1781, being stationed at Bristol, I was informed of Mr. Fletcher's arrival from his journey to Switzerland. The day after, I had such an interview with him as I shall never forget. As I had not seen him for upward of ten years, his appearance and address struck me with a mixture of surprise, solemnity, and joy. We retired into Mr. Ireland's garden, where we conversed with freedom. He then began to inquire concerning the work of God in America; and my labors for the five years I had spent on that continent. As far as I was able, I gave him a full account of every thing he wished to know. While I was giving him this relation, he stopped me no less than six times, and under the shade of the trees, poured out his soul before God for the prosperity of the work, and of the brethren there. He appeared to be as deeply interested in behalf of our suffering friends, as if they had been his own flock at Madeley. He several times called upon me to commend them to God in prayer."

On the evening of the following Monday he preached at Bristol. Mr. Rankin observes, "He spoke like one who had just left the converse of God and angels, and not like a human being." During the sermon, the whole congregation was in tears.

Mr. Fletcher soon set out for his parish. Upon his arrival, his first care was to ascertain the spiritual state of his people. Of it he said, "A cloud is over my poor parish; but alas! it is not the luminous cloud by day, nor the pillar of fire by night."

For many years previous to this period Mr. Fletcher had imbibed and cherished a prejudice against that condition in life which the apostle declares "is honorable in all:" his prejudice arose from an unfounded belief that it was less favorable to eminent holiness, than a state of celibacy. But by reading the Scripture account of Enoch, his objections were removed. He saw that if Enoch, at the head of a family, might walk with God, and be fit for translation, we also, in a similar state, might attain to high degrees of evangelical holiness.

As many as twenty-five years before this time, he became acquainted with Miss Mary Bosanquet, a lady of distinguished piety, and one who had been exposed to peculiar sufferings in the cause of godliness. A mutual attachment was then conceived, but no intimate intercourse subsisted between them until after his return from Switzerland in 1781. Their personal acquaintance was then renewed, and a combination of extraordinary circumstances resulted in the daily increase of their deep-rooted regard. Divine Providence concurred in removing out of their way, every seeming impediment to their union, and all things conspired to accelerate a connection which promised a large addition to their happiness. They were married in the public congregation at Battey church, on the 12th of September, 1781.

Shortly after his marriage, he remarked in a letter, "Had I searched the three kingdoms, I could not have found one brother willing to share gratis my weal and woe, and labors; and complaisant enough to unite his fortune to mine; but God has found me a partner, a sister, a wife, to use St. Paul's language, who is not afraid with me to face the colliers and bargemen of my parish until death part us. Buried together in one country village, we shall help one another to trim our lamps and wait, as I trust you do continually, for the coming of the heavenly Bridegroom."

From this time Mr. Fletcher considered himself as possessing the last possible addition to his earthly happiness, and never mentioned this addition to his enjoyments, but with expressions of extraordinary gratitude to God. And from this time he performed all the duties appropriate to his new relation with an unusual degree of affection and dignity. He obtained a help meet for him: by her prudence and discretion, she bore the whole weight of his domestic concerns; while by the natural activity and her long and deep experience in Divine things, she was enabled to second his ministerial labors with great success.

Mr. Fletcher being fully restored to health, and blessed with a companion who was in every sense qualified to assist him in his work and to promote his usefulness, now entered upon his Master's service with renewed zeal and diligence.

He had long felt a deep interest in the unhappy condition of the hundreds of poor ignorant children with which his parish swarmed. He instituted a day school in which he gratuitously instructed some of them, and afterward erected a building in Madeley Wood for this purpose. But when Sabbath schools were introduced, he earnestly endeavored to promote them in his own parish. Three hundred children were speedily gathered, who evinced a very great interest in the exercises of the school. To these he devoted much time and attention, and frequently gave them personal instruction. He was eminently calculated to gain their affections and enlist their attention both very desirable attainments to those charged with the instruction of youth.

On one occasion as he was speaking to them and endeavoring to fix their attention on a text which he was about to mention, a robin flew into the house; presently all eyes were turned to the little bird. "Now," said he, "I see you can attend to the robin. Well, I will take that robin for my text." He then gave them a useful lecture on the harmlessness of the robin, and the tender care of its Creator.

When he returned from abroad he became much discouraged in finding that some who once run well, had grown weary and faint in the path of piety; yet he resolved on renewed and repeated efforts

to awaken the attention of his people to the consideration of those things which belonged to their peace. God blessed his Scriptural exertions, and but a short period elapsed before he saw a general reformation in his parish; such a reformation as embraced the aged and the youth, and induced holiness of heart and life in many who had been notorious for almost every kind of wickedness.

The following circumstance happened near this time. It is given in Mr. Fletcher's words.

"One Sunday, when I had done reading prayers at Madeley, I went up into the pulpit intending to preach a sermon which I had prepared for that purpose. But my mind was so confused that I could not recollect either my text or any part of my sermon. I was afraid I should be obliged to come down without saying any thing. But having recollected myself a little, I thought I would say something on the first lesson, which was the third chapter of Daniel, containing the account of the three worthies cast into the fiery furnace: I found in doing it such extraordinary assistance from God, and such a singular enlargement of heart, that I supposed there must be some cause for it. I therefore desired that if any of the congregation had met with any thing in particular, they would acquaint me with it in the ensuing week.

"In consequence of this, on the Wednesday after, a person came and gave me the following account: 'Mrs. K. had been for some time much concerned for her soul. She attended the church at all opportunities, and spent much time in private prayer. At this, her husband, (who is a butcher,) was exceedingly enraged, and threatened severely what he would do if she did not leave off going to John Fletcher's church; yea, if she dared to go to any religious meetings whatever. When she told him that she could not in conscience refrain from going at least to the parish church, he grew quite outrageous, and swore dreadfully that if she went any where, he would cut her throat as soon as she came home! This made her cry mightily to God that he would support her in the trying hour. And though she did not feel any great degree of comfort, yet she resolved to go on in her duty, and leave the event with him.

" 'Last Sunday, after many struggles with the enemy and her own heart, she came down stairs ready to go to church. Her husband asked her whether she was resolved to go thither? She told him she was. "Well then," said he, "I shall not cut your throat as I intended; but I will heat the oven and throw you into it the moment you come home. Notwithstanding this threatening, which he enforced with many bitter oaths, she went to church praying all the way that God would strengthen her for whatever might befall her.

" 'While you were speaking of the three Hebrews whom Nebuchadnezzar cast into the burning fiery furnace, she found it all belonged to her, and God applied every word to her heart. And when the sermon was ended, she thought that if she had a thousand lives, she could lay them all down for God. She felt her whole soul so filled with his love that she hastened home, fully determined to give herself to whatsoever God pleased; nothing doubting but that either he would take her to heaven if he suffered her to be burnt to death, or that he would some way deliver her as he did his three servants who trusted in him. But when she opened the door, to her astonishment and comfort, she found her husband's wrath abated, and she soon had reason to believe that he was under a concern for the salvation of his soul. The next Lord's day he attended Divine service at the church. I now know why my sermon was taken away from me, namely, that God might thus magnify his mercy."

Mr. and Mrs. Fletcher having been repeatedly invited to visit Dublin, spent a few days there in the summer of 1784. His private instructions, and example, and his public ministrations, were eminently useful to those who enjoyed the privilege of them. As his receipts from his parish were but small, the friends in Dublin conceived it but an act of justice to refund the expenses he had been at in visiting them. The stewards and trustees having made up a small purse tendered it to him, not as a present, but as a debt justly due to him. But he firmly and absolutely refused to receive it. At length, as they were very urgent with him, and importuned to excess, he took the purse in his hand: "Well," said he, "do you really force it upon me? Must I accept of it? Is it entirely mine? And may I do with it as I please?" "Yes, yes," they all replied. "God be praised then, God be praised," said he, casting his brimful eyes to heaven, "behold what a mercy is here! Your poor's fund was just out. I heard some of you complaining that it was never so low before. Take this purse, God has sent it you, raised it among yourselves, and bestowed it upon your poor. You cannot deny me, it is sacred to them. God be praised! I thank you, I heartily thank you, my dear kind brethren."

THE LIFE OF JOHN FLETCHER
By
An Anonymous Friend of Sabbath Schools

CHAPTER 9

Mr. Fletcher's happy state of mind -- Illness -- Preaches his last sermon and administers the Lord's Supper -- Affecting visit of his people -- Death and burial -- Character -- Character from a periodical.

The laying of the foundation for the Sabbath schools, was the last public work in which Mr. Fletcher was engaged. He had designed much for the benefit of his parish, but the Head of the Church saw fit to remove him before he had time to execute his plans. There was no declension either in his piety or his zeal; the one continued steadily to increase, the other burnt with a brilliant flame, to the close of his holy and useful life.

A few weeks before he was taken ill, he was favored with a peculiar manifestation of the love of God, while these words were powerfully applied to his heart, "Thou shalt walk with me in white." In speaking of this season, he said, "I sometimes find such gleams of light and love, such wafts of the heavenly air so powerful, as if they would just then take my soul with them to glory! But I am not filled. I want to be filled with all the fulness of God." Afterward, during his sickness he said, "I am filled, most sweetly filled."

For a short time previous to his last illness, he was deeply impressed with the brevity of life and the nearness of eternity. He was much engaged in prayer that he might do and suffer all the will of God. Although thus impressed with the weight of eternal things, yet he showed an unusual cheerfulness and liveliness in every part of his work, and seemed to increase in bodily vigor as well as in spiritual strength. Having fought the good fight of faith, he was now approaching the end of his course with joy and triumph.

On Thursday, August 4, he was occupied in his usual parish duties, from three in the afternoon until nine in the evening. He remarked on his return home, that he had taken cold. On Friday and Saturday he was unwell but much engaged in prayer.

Saturday evening he was much worse and had considerable fever. Believing it to be his duty to attend the usual services on the next Sabbath, he would listen to no persuasion to relinquish his purpose. When a neighboring clergyman offered to supply his place, Mr. Fletcher assured him with a holy confidence, that God would sufficiently strengthen him to go through the duties of the day.

Sunday 7. He attended the church, and opened the reading service with apparent strength; but he had not proceeded far, when his countenance changed, his voice faltered, and he with difficulty kept himself from fainting. He was solicited to desist, but as if conscious he was engaged in his last public work, he mildly refused, and struggling against an almost insupportable languor, he constrained himself to continue the service. The windows being opened, he appeared to be a little refreshed, and began to preach with a strength and recollection that surprised all present. The subject of his discourse was, the mercy of God; and while he expatiated on its unsearchable extent, its eternal

duration, and its astonishing effects, he appeared to be carried above all the infirmities of humanity. On this solemn occasion there was something in his appearance and manner that gave the word an irresistible influence. An awful concern was awakened through the whole assembly, and almost every heart was greatly affected.

After sermon, being about to administer the Lord's Supper, he walked up to the communion table uttering these words, "I am going to throw myself under the wings of the cherubim before the mercy seat." The scene now became almost insupportable. Groans were heard and tears were seen on every side. In performing this service he was exhausted several times, and sunk down on the communion table; still he resumed his sacred work, and with his dying hands cheerfully distributed the symbols of a dying Saviour's love. During the administration of this ordinance, he gave out several verses of hymns, and delivered many affectionate exhortations to his people, calling upon them to celebrate the mercy of God in songs of adoration and praise. And having finished the services, which had lasted nearly four hours, he was supported from the altar to his chamber: after laying some time in a swoon he came to, but never walked out again.

After having slept some time, on awaking, he very pleasantly said to Mrs. Fletcher, "Now my dear, thou seest I am no worse for doing the Lord's work. He never fails me when I trust in him." He continued in a most delightful frame of mind through the evening. At night his fever returned, but it was not violent, and yet his strength decreased very fast.

On Monday and Tuesday he lay on a couch in his study. He possessed the same cheerful, happy frame of mind that he had enjoyed for a length of time. Mrs. Fletcher asked him, "Have you any conviction that God is about to take you?" He replied, "No; only I see death so inexpressibly near, that we both seem to stand on the verge of eternity."

Wednesday, he observed to Mrs. Fletcher, that he had received such a manifestation of the meaning of those words, "God is love," as he could never express. "It fills my heart," said he. "Shout! Shout aloud! I want a gust of praise to go to the ends of the earth!" He had now arrived at that desirable point where the last rapturous discoveries are made to the souls of dying saints. Roused as it were by the shouts of angels and kindled into a rapture by the visions of glory, he broke out into this song of holy triumph.

A pious member of the family now entered the room, when he cried out, "O Sally, God is love! Shout, both of you! I want to hear you shout his praise!" At this time his physician hoped he was in no danger, as he slept well, had a regular pulse, and had not the least degree of delirium.

On Thursday his speech began to fail. While he was able he spoke to all whom he saw. Hearing that a stranger had come in, he wished her to be called to him. But the uttering of only two sentences to her, made him ready to faint away. When much exhausted, Mrs. Fletcher spoke these words, "God is Love!" when instantly, as if all his powers were awakened, he cried out, "God is love! God is love! O for that gust of praise! I want to sound!" -- Here his voice again failed. He suffered much pain, but endured it with the greatest patience.

Friday, his strength continued to fail. He evidently wished to converse, but could not. He had always taken a particular pleasure in hearing or repeating these words,

"Jesus' blood through earth and skies,
Mercy, free, boundless mercy cries."

Whenever Mrs. Fletcher repeated them to him he would answer, "Boundless! boundless, boundless!" With much difficulty he now added,

"Mercy's full power I soon shall prove,
Loved with an everlasting love."

On Saturday his fever seemed to have left him, and a few friends standing near his bed, he reached his hand to each; and on observing a minister present, said to him, "Are you ready to assist tomorrow?" His recollection appeared remarkable, as the day of the week had not been mentioned. Many were of the opinion that he would recover. One said to him, "Do you think the Lord will raise you up?" He endeavored to answer, but could only say, "Raise me up in the resur---," meaning in the resurrection. To another who at another time proposed the same question, he replied, "I leave it all to God."

His fever returned with greater violence in the evening: and it now became too evident that his life was fast drawing to a close. He had entirely lost the use of his voice; yet he retained the perfect use of his mental faculties. Mrs. Fletcher said to him, "I ask not for myself, but for the sake of others, if Jesus be very present with thee, lift up thy right hand." Immediately he did. "If the prospect of glory sweetly opens before thee, repeat the sign." He instantly raised it again, and in half a minute a second time. He then threw it up as if he would reach the top of the bed. During the next eighteen hours, he lay more at ease, and generally most sweetly composed. While he was thus breathing out his soul into the hands of his faithful Creator, his people were offering up their joint supplications on his behalf, in the house of God. The whole village wore an air of melancholy and distress.

At the conclusion of the evening service, several of the poor who came from distant parts of the parish, and who were usually entertained under Mr. Fletcher's roof on the Sabbath, still lingered about the house as if unable to tear themselves away from the place without a sight of their dying pastor. That they might be gratified, the door of his chamber was set open, immediately before which Mr. Fletcher was sitting upright in his bed, and unaltered in his usual venerable appearance. They passed slowly along the gallery one by one, pausing as they came to the door, and casting in a look of mingled supplication and anguish.

And now the moment drew nigh when earth was to be swallowed up of life. All was silent -- when the messenger arrived and performed his commission with so much stillness and secrecy, that the moment of its completion could not be determined. His lips ceased to move -- the purple current ceased to flow -- the wheels of life stood still -- his warfare was accomplished, and his happy spirit took its everlasting flight.

Such was the death of this eminently holy, laborious, and useful pastor. He died in the vicarage at Madeley, on the evening of Sunday, August 14, 1786, in the fifty-sixth year of his age.

His remains were interred in Madeley church yard, on the 17th, amidst the tears and lamentations of thousands. The Rev. Mr. Hatton delivered an appropriate discourse on the occasion, from Hebrews xiii, 7.

The following sketch will be read with interest by such as wish to know something of his personal appearance. He was about the middle stature, strongly built, and well proportioned. The contour of his face was interesting and noble; his eye was active and penetrating; his nose was moderately aquiline [curved like an eagle's beak -- DVM]; his whole countenance highly accorded with the extraordinary grace and elevation of his character. His deportment and manners were of the most engaging and courteous kind, and presented such a combination of gravity, condescension, and gentleness, as few have ever witnessed. Humility and dignity were so finely proportioned and adjusted in him, that while his superiority was discoverable in his air, carriage, and conversation, at the same time he evinced the meekness and simplicity of a child. His figure was fully adapted to all the sacred offices which he had to perform; but of his appearance in the pulpit, the liveliest fancy could not frame for any of the ancient saints, an aspect more venerable and apostolic.

If from the "account already given, any discerning person may with very little difficulty extract his character," still much reflection has convinced me, that while it is very easy to say much in relation to it, nevertheless, it is "extremely difficult to give a just idea of this great man." The following summary is merely an abridgment of a part of the several sketches of his character, by his biographers.

Mr. Fletcher was a most eminent Christian. The foundation for his piety was laid in a deep and thorough repentance for his sins; for notwithstanding his exemplary moral conduct in early life, and his general freedom from gross sins, yet when enlightened, he was fully convinced of his depravity, guiltiness, and danger. He sought to obtain justification by obedience to the law, but failed; he then sought peace of mind by mortification and bodily austerity but with no more success; he next sought and found peace with God through faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. His faith embraced Christ in his true and proper Divinity, and in all his offices, while it relied on him alone for pardon, acceptance, and salvation. Through faith he renounced the world, and chose to suffer afflictions with the people of God. By faith he received and held fast all the truths of Divine revelation, not as abstract truths, but as a communication of the mind and will of God, made with special reference to man's state and happiness. His was truly a life of faith; for he lived and walked by it to the end of his course.

He possessed the evidences of true faith and brought forth all its fruits in an unusual degree of plenty and richness. His peace became like a river, and at times his joy was unspeakable and full of glory. Having had much forgiven, he loved much. The love of God was abundantly shed abroad in his heart. He lived in its enjoyment, acted under its influence, was favored with its fulness, and assimilated to its nature. Few men since the days of John the beloved disciple, have enjoyed and evidenced so much of this God-like principle as Mr. Fletcher.

His love to God was scripturally evinced by a love to man, which in strength and fervor was only less than supreme. For the children of God he felt and cultivated the most devoted affection. It was a love which was unquenchable by the many waters of cold neglect, and personal abuse which at different times poured like torrents upon him. His Christian charity was of an enlarged and diffusive character: it overleaped denominational boundaries and sectional limits, and embraced in its arms all the children of God, of every name and nation. These he loved with an ardent brotherly attachment. He desired their prosperity, and earnestly prayed for their union, usefulness, and happiness. His love to the poor was without bounds, and his exertions to relieve their necessities procured for the needy within his parish many valuable donations from his friends at a distance. His benevolence to them very frequently exhausted his purse; it unfurnished his house, impoverished his table, and at times almost emptied his ward robe. He generally gave them nearly the whole amount which he received for his services as a minister. One of his almost dying expressions was, "O my poor! What will become of my poor!"

He was favored with a communion with God, which was much deeper and more free from interruption than is usually enjoyed even by eminent Christians. This grace he possessed in a greater or less degree at all times, in all places, and through all the stages of his spiritual life. He ever endeavored to set God before him; to see his eye fixed upon him; and to think, speak, and act as in his presence. It was his consolation in adversity, and his joyful prosperity; it sustained him in temptation, and afforded him peace in the midst of trouble.

It would be difficult to mention any fruit of the Spirit, which was not plentifully brought forth in the life of this eminent Christian. He was a constellation of graces, an assemblage of the highest order of Christian excellencies. He promptly and constantly denied himself, took up his cross, and followed the footsteps of his Lord and Master. He might most fitly be styled a man of prayer. Prayer was the employment in which his soul delighted. Whether he was in his pulpit or his study; at home or abroad; alone or in company; conversing with those in health, or comforting the afflicted in the sick chamber; still his soul was either vocally or silently breathing out its fervent desires to the God of heaven. He was an example of patience under sufferings, and of meekness under provocations and injuries; he was courageous in the performance of duty even in the face of great danger, and fearless in the support and defense of the truth which he loved as he did his own soul; yet he was gentle and easy to be entreated. His religious character was strongly marked by firmness and stability. He had but one mind, one object to be gained. At the very outset he fixed his eye upon the crown of life, he did not lose sight of it; he fasted, he prayed, he labored, he suffered, he died, and through Christ he has gained it.

But the grace in which he most excelled, which crowned all others, and made them appear to the greatest advantage was his humility. He even entertained a low opinion of himself, both as a Christian and as a minister, and knew not that he shone in either of those characters. He not only did not seek the honor which comes from man, but truly delighted in preferring every one to himself, and in being regarded as the least of all saints. He would never suffer himself or his performances to be commended in his presence; if any attempted it, he immediately checked it with an air of severity which he never assumed but upon such occasions. He took as much pains to conceal his excellencies as others do to show theirs, and was continually on his guard lest any word should drop from his lips

or pen which would tend to make any one think well of him; either on account of his family, learning, talents, or usefulness.

The Head of the Church enriched Mr. Fletcher with many natural talents which were calculated to render him eminent and useful in his service. To these his providence added extensive and various learning, embracing whatever of science was desirable to qualify him for the great work in which he intended to employ him. To all these qualifications was added the indispensable preparation of an experimental knowledge of God; and subsequently he was distinguished by an extensive acquaintance with the deep things of God. He long hesitated between a sense of duty and an humbling sense of his own weakness and insufficiency; but when he entered the sacred office, he did it with a single eye to the glory of God.

Whether we regard him as preacher, or as a pastor, zeal for God and love to God and souls, will appear to be the ruling principles of his heart and life. In the discharge of his public and private duties, he was conscientious, diligent, and faithful. He sought, not to secure the fleece, but to serve the flock. He never entered the sacred desk, nor exerted himself while in it, to gain the applause of men: his whole aim while in this awful place, was, to glorify God and save souls. He boldly and yet affectionately declared the whole counsel of God. He clearly exhibited the doctrines, duties, and privileges of the Christian religion. His labors for the salvation of the souls of his charge were very great. It is the least of all that can be said of him, that he was a popular preacher. The large congregations who heard him in England, Ireland, France, and Switzerland, bore evidence of his deep piety and uncommon talents: while from each of those countries some jewels shall be gathered, who will be stars in the crown of his rejoicing.

As a writer of polemical theology, he justly sustains a high rank among those who have been set for the defense of the gospel. His style is somewhat diffuse and florid [elaborate, complex -- DVM]; yet he exhibits the principal doctrines of the Christian system in a judicious, lucid, and interesting manner. His illustrations are original and appropriate, and in many instances very striking. His defense of those doctrines which were assailed and vilified by some of his opponents, discovers a discriminating and comprehensive mind, which was capable of embracing the whole analogy of faith, and of assigning to each doctrine its real importance and relative influence. His arguments are numerous, various, and cogent. In one important point, his works are unrivaled; they breathe throughout a most pious and amiable temper, and show that their author possessed an affectionate and catholic spirit. The following high compliment was paid to his "Checks" by a pious clergyman who was resolved to live and die in his own opinion. On being pressed to read them, he replied, "No; I will never read Mr. Fletcher's Checks: for if I did, I should be of his mind." They will long be read and admired by the friends of the benevolent Gospel of Christ.

The following character of Mr. Fletcher was given in a periodical within a few days after his death: --

"On the 14th instant, departed this life, the Rev. John Fletcher, Vicar of Madeley, to the inexpressible grief and concern of his parishioners, and of all who had the happiness of knowing him. If we speak of him as a man, and as a gentleman, he was possessed of every virtue an of every accomplishment which adorns and dignifies human nature. If we attempt to speak of him as a

minister of the Gospel, it will be exceedingly difficult to give the world a just idea of this great man. His deep learning, his exalted piety, his unceasing labors to perform the important duty of his function, together with the abilities and good effect with which he discharged those duties, are best known and will never be forgotten in that vineyard in which he labored. His charity, his universal benevolence, his meekness, and exemplary goodness, are scarcely equaled among the sons of men. Anxious to discharge the sacred duties of his office to the last moments of his life, he performed the service of the Church and administered the holy sacrament, to upward of two hundred communicants, the Sunday preceding his death, confiding in that Almighty power which had given him life, and resigning that life into the hands of Him who gave it, with that composure of mind and those joyful hopes of a happy resurrection, which accompany the last moments of the just."

Let my last days be like his!

THE END